

Testimony by Gerald Danforth, Chairman

Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

Public Hearing on:

*Small Business Development in Native American Communities: Is the Federal government meeting its obligations?*

April 30, 2002

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify on Small Business Development in Native American Communities. The Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin, respectfully submits the following testimony on "Is the Federal Government meeting its obligations?"

The purpose of this legislation as introduced by Senator Tim Johnson is to provide business development assistance to Native American Communities, and offer financial and resource assistance. Also, to establish and keep Native American business centers in operation.

The Oneida Tribe has attempted to develop our own Small Business Programs and have received little help from state or federal programs, therefore we welcome and support this bill. We hope this is not an end but rather a good first step to a beginning for support of Native Americans across Indian Country.

In Indian Country the largest revenue generator has been our gaming enterprises and this legislation would be beneficial to the success of our tribal entrepreneurs and our tribal governments. This bill would give us an opportunity to diversify and expand our economies.

The Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin have established two small business development programs. These programs have the same goal but two different priorities. One program focuses on developing tribal businesses on the reservation. The other program is designed to help tribal members start a business anywhere in the United States.

The purpose of these programs is to develop a community initiative for small business entrepreneurs to start a business, support each other's businesses and learn from each other. Currently there are few small businesses on the Oneida Reservation and there is a list of over 80 current people interested in small business operation.

Both programs are in a position to receive funding to establish a revolving loan fund. The Oneida Business Committee worked over their three year tenure to establish these programs. To get these projects off the ground, we used internal resources, such as tribal members, local community professionals, and small business entrepreneurs. Although we have made progress, we still struggle to provide financial resources and technical assistance. This legislation will help us leverage our two programs.

The Oneida Tribe believes this bill will have a positive affect on Native American Communities by allowing easier access for Native American entrepreneurs to start, operate, and grow small businesses. This assistance would also include computers, graphic workstations, CD-ROM technology, reference materials. We believe the development of management, technical skills and federal procurement opportunities are ways to strengthen the success of these businesses.

Another positive aspect of this legislation is, whether you're a prospective or current owner of a small business, you are still eligible for funding. We believe this legislation is just as important to those want to start their own business, as well as those already established.

In conclusion, the Oneida Tribe would like to reiterate our support for Senate Johnson's legislation. I look forward to strengthening and diversifying our tribal economy for generations to come. Once again, thank you for time and attention on this matter.